The Ann & Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail Comprehensive Signage Plan

Phase 2 Concept through Schematic Design
Community Engagement Report

Issued: February 9, 2024
Prepared by The Trail Conservancy

Introduction

Project Description

With more than 4.9 million visits annually, the 10-mile hike-and-bike Trail and associated 250 acres of parkland is Austin's most recognized and popular recreational area.

The Comprehensive Signage Project entails reviewing and updating the existing wayfinding system for improvement, expansion, increased visibility, and brand expression.
-From Phase 1: Inventory & Analysis Report by Page

Phase 2 Concept through Schematic Design Overview

Phase 2 of the project builds on the inventory, analysis, and community input gathered during Phase 1. During Phase 2, TTC & Page presented the findings from Phase 1, how that influenced Phase 2, and the initially proposed concept designs for on-Trail signage. This document is a report of findings from Phase 2.

Contents:

Engagement Methods & Strategies

Methods:

For this phase of community engagement, The Trail Conservancy utilized multiple different methods, both virtually and in-person, to gather community input:

1. Online survey that ran from November 4th to December 7th, 2023
2. On-Trail Pop-Ups at Johnson Creek Trailhead and Festival Beach on November 4th, 2023
3. On-Trail interviewer from November 6th, 2023, to December 7th, 2023
4. Presentation to Violet Crown Cycling Club on November 6th, 2023
5. On-Trail Pop-Up for morning commuters on November 14th, 2023
6. Presentation to Holly Neighborhood Group on November 14th, 2023
7. Presentation to the East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Association on November 15th, 2023
8. Pop-Up at Joe's Bakery (2305 E 7th St) on November 16th, 2023
9. Pop-Up during after-school care at the Mendez Recreation Center on November 29th, 2023

Engagement Strategies Headcounts:

Trail Interviewer 18.7%
Online Survey 42.9%
In-Person Events 38.4%
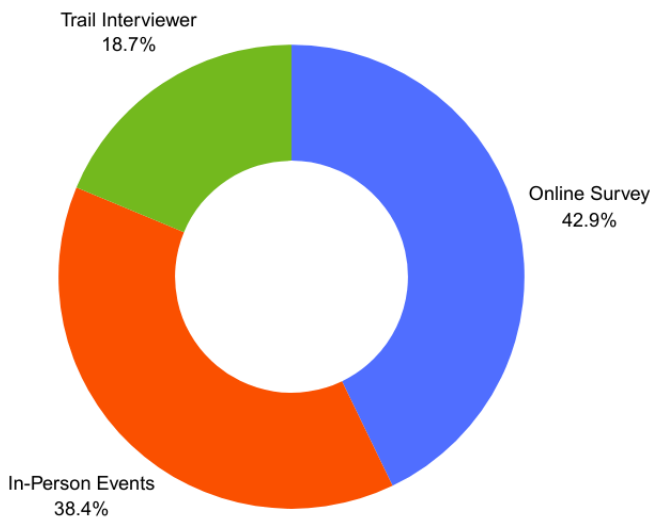
In total, The Trail Conservancy interacted with 609 people - 348 in-person interactions and 261 through the online survey.

For in-person strategies, TTC had events and pop-ups at different times and days of the week to try to meet different Trail users on and off the Trail, including:
- Weekday morning on the Trail
- Weekday morning in the community
- Weekend morning on the Trail
- Weekday evening in the community

In addition to the project events, TTC also presented to stakeholders in hopes of gaining specific feedback from and encouraging different groups to take the survey at their meetings.

Chart above of percentages of the number of people and how they engaged with us for Phase 2 of the Comprehensive Signage Plan

Throughout the time that the survey was live, TTC also had an interviewer out on the Trail, getting feedback directly from people who were actively using the Trail. The interviewer was able to talk to 114 people at various days, times, and locations across the Trail.

TTC showed the same graphics for all engagement methods and used the same interview questions, available in Addendum A.

Communication Strategies:

During Phase 2 of this project, TTC communicated to the public through social media channels, newsletter announcements, and a Storymap to keep the public updated as the project continued. Between October and December of 2023, TTC posted about the project six times on social media, reaching 15,017 and engaging 5,557. The project engagement opportunities were written about in TTC's October, November, and December newsletters to an average audience of 20,642, with a click-through rate of 7.83% to the survey. TTC additionally updated The Trail Conservancy's website and the homepage to encourage stakeholders to attend an event or participate in the online survey.

TTC also utilized our partner's communications to reach demographics beyond The Trail Conservancy's specific networks. In collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD), a PARD website was created to keep the community informed via the City of Austin ("the City") channels. TTC partnered with Get There ATX, a project team of members from the COA Transportation Department and Movability, to host a Trail pop-up and communicate about the project and survey through their newsletter and social media channels.

TTC also worked with the Austin Monitor from November 28th to December 6th, 2024 to promote public service announcements about the engagement, resulting in an average click-through rate of 2.77% for newsletters and 216 clicks from Austin Monitor website visitors. Analyzing the survey data, the highest online survey traction spikes directly align with the communication pushes. In the first three days of the Austin Monitor advertising campaign, TTC received 93 survey responses.

Demographics

Online survey

Through the online survey, TTC gathered optional self-identified demographic data about survey takers. The following charts walk through the data collected.

How do survey respondents use the Butler Trail?
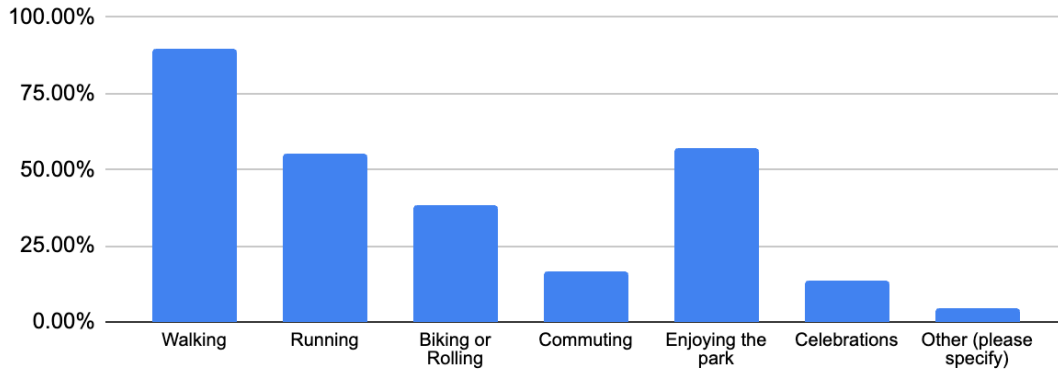
TTC asked survey takers how they used the Trail, allowing them to select any box that applied to them. The majority of respondents (89.92%) are using the Trail to "walk," with "enjoying the park" (57.14%) and "running" (55.04%) almost tied. Eleven comments were left underneath "Other (please specify)," including comments about dogs, the water, volunteering, transportation, workouts, meetings, and mindfulness.
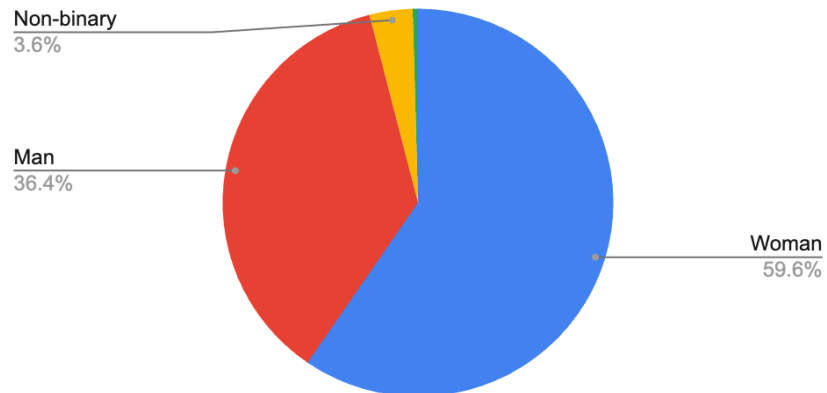
Survey respondents were also asked how they identify by age, gender, and race.

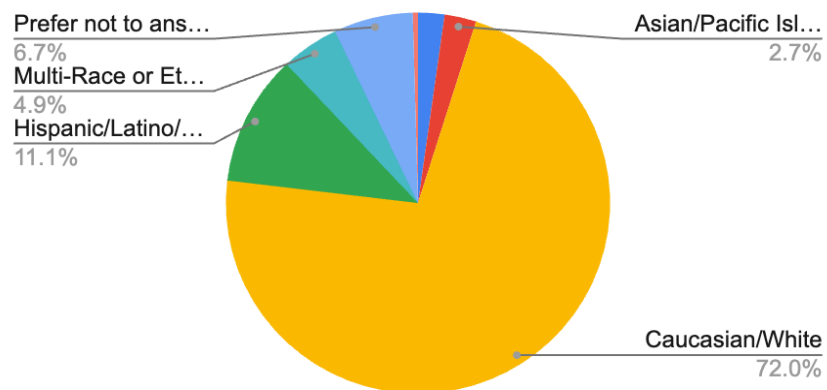## What are survey respondents' age ranges?
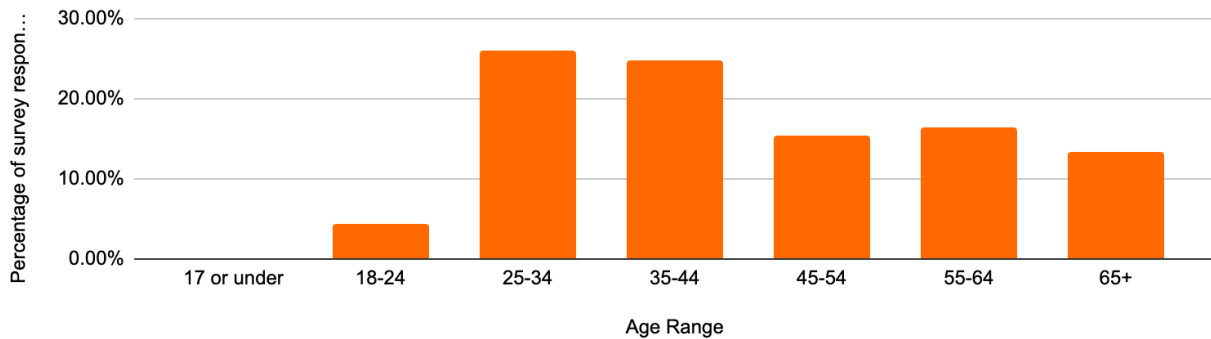
The age ranges of "25-34" (25.99%) and "35-44" (24.67%) were the two highest responses.

How are survey respondents identifying their gender?

Non-binary
3.6%

Man
36.4%

Woman
59.6%

TTC had more people who identified as a "Woman" (59.6%) in comparison to "Man" (36.4%), "Non-Binary" (3.56%), or "Different identifier" (0.44%).

How do survey respondents identify themselves?

Prefer not to ans…
6.7%

Multi-Race or Et…
4.9%

Hispanic/Latino/…
11.1%

Asian/Pacific Isl…
2.7%

Caucasian/White
72.0%

Most respondents identified as Caucasian/White (72%), with the second-highest identification as Hispanic/Latino/a/x (11.1%).

In-person Interviews

TTC also interviewed Trail users while on the Trail and offered optional self-identification forms to respond to. The following charts walk through the data collected.

How are interview respondents using the Trail?
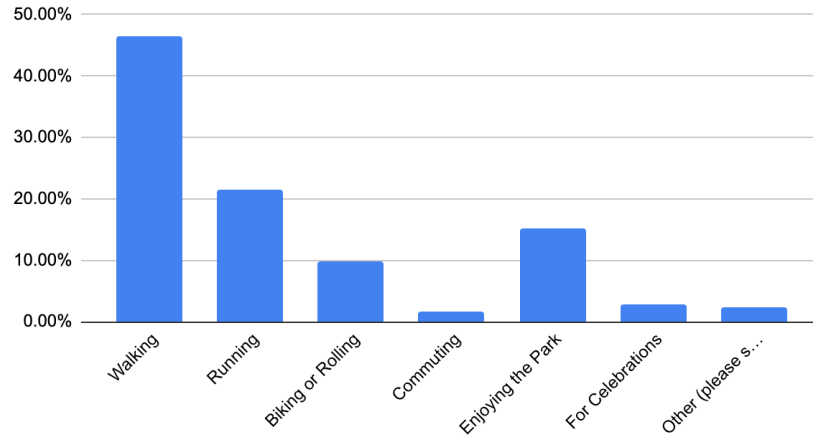
Like the survey, interview participants also used the Trail mostly by "walking" (46.51%), with "running" (21.51%) as the next most popular activity.

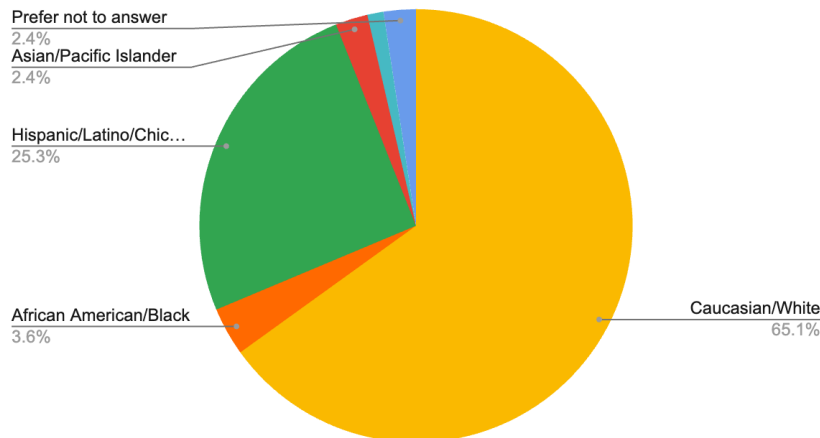## What are interview respondents' age ranges?
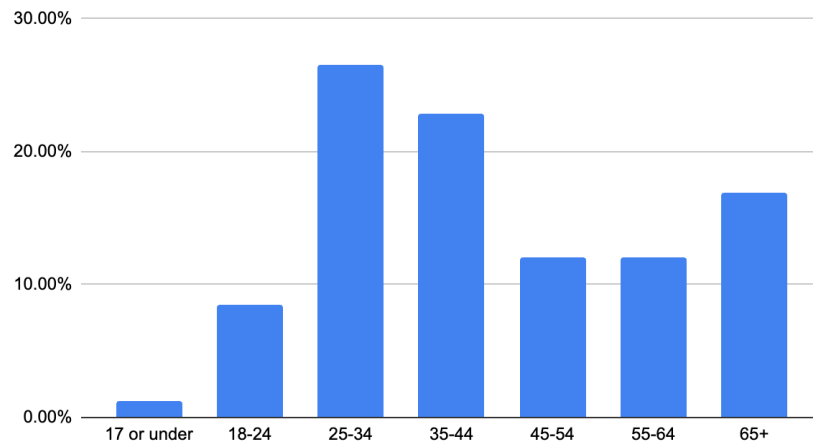
Like the survey, the interview participants were mostly from "25-34" and "35-44."

How are interview respondents identifying their gender?

Prefer not to answer
4.8%

Non-binary
1.2%

Woman
49.4%

Man
44.6%
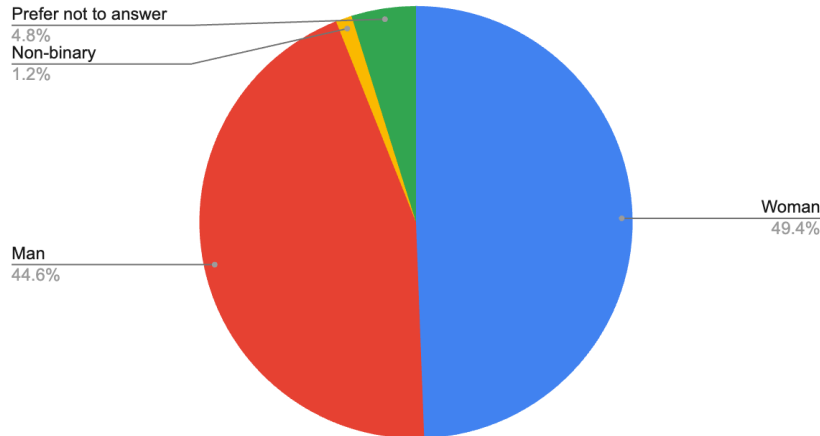
Although at a lower percentage than survey respondents, there were still more interview participants identified as a "Woman" (49.4%) than other categories of "Man" (44.6%), "Non-binary" (1.2%), and "Prefer not to answer" (4.8%).

How do interview respondents identify themselves?

Prefer not to answer
2.4%

Asian/Pacific Islander
2.4%

Hispanic/Latino/Chic...
25.3%

African American/Black
3.6%

Caucasian/White
65.1%

Interview respondents identified themselves primarily as "Caucasian/White" (65.1%), with "Hispanic/Latino/Chicano/x/a" (25.3%) as the second highest category.

Our goal for the Comprehensive Signage Project engagement demographics was to achieve representation that parallels the demographic makeup of Austin. According to the US Census Bureau, in Austin, "White alone" makes up 63.2% of the population, "White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino" makes up 47.7%, and "Hispanic/Latino" makes up 32.5%.[1] For both in-person and online efforts, the engagement demographics do not align with Austin's demographics. However, the interview demographics align slightly more closely with Austin's demographics than the survey.

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[1] Data from the US Census Buereau about Austin's demographic make up:
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/austincitytexas/LND110210

Online Survey

As stated, the Trail Conservancy conducted an online survey via Survey Monkey from November 4 to December 7, 2024, resulting in responses from 261 Trail users. Survey respondents were asked 18 questions about the project, ranging from findings from Phase 1 to specific feedback on the presented designs. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with 86.32% of respondents agreeing that the presented signage family supported the project's vision, guiding principles, and community feedback. On average, for all questions asked, 77.86% responded positively to this signage design, while 17.92% responded that it might improve the current signage system, and 4.22% responded that it would not.

The most positive feedback was about the proposed design's ability to identify that someone was on the Butler Trail with visual elements, with 87.34% of respondents saying that the signage system would help, 9.28% saying maybe it would help, and 3.38% saying it would not help. The most mixed feedback was about whether this signage system would help get more people out to the Trail, with 45.96% of respondents saying it would help, 45.96% saying it might help, and 8.09% saying it would not help.

In addition to answering the questions, respondents were also able to leave comments on each question. Of 261 respondents, 53.26% (139) left comments, resulting in 521 total survey comments. Comments were categorized based on their content, with some comments touching on multiple topics. To see the full category key, see Addendum B. The three most popular comment categories were "Content," "Appearance/Design," and "Mile Markers." "Appearance/Design" included any comment about the sign's visual appearance, including size and design. Comments relating to color were separately categorized as "Color positive, negative, or neutral" separately.

A more detailed analysis of the comments and responses will be addressed in the "Themes & Next Steps" section.

In-Person Events & Interviews

For the sake of this report, all in-person events and strategies (including presentations, on and off Trail pop-ups, and interviews) have been consolidated and analyzed as one, resulting in 348 in-person engagements. Similarly to the online survey, in-person respondents were led through a series of questions based on Phase 1 findings and the proposed designs, though not all respondents answered all questions. On average, 82.45% of respondents viewed the proposed signage positively, with an average of 12.61% "maybe" and 4.16% "no."

With in-person strategies being more conversational, there was a higher percentage, 67.20%, of respondents who gave additional comments, which resulted in 252 comments. Similar to the survey comments, all comments were categorized according to the key in Addendum B. The top three comment categories were "Generally Positive," "Maps," and "Wayfinding"

Themes & Next Steps

Overall, across all engagement methods and questions asked (both in person and online), on average, 80% responded that the proposed signage design would improve their overall Trail experience, 15% responded that it might improve their overall Trail experience, and 4% responded that it would not improve their overall Trail experience. In total, across all engagement methods, TTC received 773 comments. Comments were categorized based on content, with some comments deemed relevant to multiple topics. The top three categories were "Signage Content" (11%), "Generally Positive" (10%), and "Maps" (8%).

Sample of Respondent Comments for "Generally Positive" Category:

"I like the consistency."

"I have lived in this area for 36 years. I still think this will help."

"They look more structured and uniform."

Sample of Respondent Comments for "Maps" Category:

"Love the map orientation."

"Seeing where we are within the whole system is good."

"Include distances so people know what they are getting into."

"For points where people have to make a decision to turn to stay on the 4.1-mile loop or 3-mile loop, for instance, it would be nice to have a map with the section they are turning onto highlighted...for example, for the Pflugerville Bridge sign, you would see the bridge highlighted with the entire loop map displayed, so people know where they are and whether or not it is the correct turn."

In analyzing responses to the questions and comments, TTC saw overarching themes in:
- Signage Content
- Appearance/Design
- Navigation/Wayfinding

Sample of Respondent Comments for "Signage Content" Theme and Category:

"Consider QR codes on signs to get more detailed maps, ecological info, history info, and more."

"More or better identified/named landscape or placemaking features E of 35"

"[More] Educational & informational signage"

"This is not a museum. It is a place to be in nature with as little intervention as possible. Take caution when adding signs across various categories."

"Some things like personal trail stories / wellness moments can become dated very quickly. If these become part of the programming -- consider if there is a way to digitally update those elements for adaptability over time."

Next Steps for Signage Content:
Included in the scope of work for the next phase of the Comprehensive Signage Plan is a focus on content for signs and maps, as well as ways to integrate those into a design that works for all abilities. Page will evaluate all comments for the continuation and iteration of the signage designs and plan, for example, more signage content around Trail etiquette.

Regarding **Appearance/Design**, TTC asked if the proposed signage "would reduce sign clutter on the Trail" and help "identify to Trail users that they were on and using the Butler Trail with visual elements, such as color and icons." Across all responses, 78% agreed that the proposed designs would accomplish those objectives. Only 5% of the comments received had a negative reaction to the color of the signs.

Other comments on the design included the categories:
- "Font size" (1%)
- "Language" (1%)
- "Lighting" (1%)

Sample of Respondent Comments from these categories:

"The text is way too small."

"Make sure the text is big enough to read and catch attention."

"Add QR codes to access signage online in different languages such as Mandarin, Korean, etc."

"I would say some sort of language access - QR code to a larger map with multiple languages? but ideally, the visual is so intuitive that language isn't a big deal."

"Lighting on signs for early morning or late night."

"Could be nice to include lights and safety call buttons."

Next steps for Appearance/Design:
In response, Page has increased font size on select signage and will look into the inclusion of bilingual text. Lighting the signs will not be considered due to infrastructure, cost, and the overall findings in the 2020 Butler Trail Safety & Mobility Study.

For **Navigation/Wayfinding**, TTC asked if the signage would improve:
- Navigation on and off the Trail
- Getting to nearby destinations
- Trail entrances
- Finding amenities
- Improving areas of confusion
- Helping new users/visitors
- Better utilization of mile markers

Of the responses, 80% agreed that the proposed signage would improve navigation and wayfinding in those areas. Comments were categorized as Navigation/Wayfinding:
- "Mile Markers" (7%),
- "Wayfinding" (5%),
- "Connections" (5%)
- "Amenities" (3%)

Sample of Respondent Comments from these categories:

"Where do the mile markers start, and how are you showing that on the mile markers for .5 and 1 mile?"

"Most looking forward to the mile markers."

"I'm glad to see that they would be less frequent; every quarter mile is excessive."

"I loved the every quarter mile markers and STRONGLY prefer you keep them!!!!!! Would rather have every quarter mile marked than have big signs with so much written info."

"It would be great to also put signs directing people to the trail at nearby intersections or roads from where people may be coming (i.e., a sign 1 block away pointing to the trailhead). While these trailhead signs are helpful once you get to the trailhead, sometimes it's hard to get to the trail or know there is a trail in the first place. If you're biking or walking on a street nearby, it would be nice to know that a few blocks away from you is a trail that you can be on instead. This would increase awareness of the trail and the number of visitors on the trail, and would help the many out-of-town visitors Austin receives during events to know what nice outdoor amenities there are for them to visit."

"I like that the crossings are highlighted on the new map."

"Would be helpful if the new signs had street names or when the nearest intersection was coming up."

"More references, with distances, to off-trail destinations would be helpful.'

"It would be helpful to know that there's a bathroom coming up, not just a sign at the bathroom, but a sign for how much longer it will be until the bathroom because this has prevented me from going out on the trail in the past, not knowing when the next bathroom will be."

"Will water fountains be marked on here?"

Next steps for Navigation/Wayfinding:
Based on comments and suggestions from the respondents, TTC and Page will add distances to the next restroom on the ½ mile markers and evaluate if and how to display other amenities, such as water fountains (16 comments or 2% of all comments). TTC and Page will additionally look into if and how to utilize QR codes for additional map and language displays (24 comments or 3%).

Phase 3 of Comprehensive Signage

Based on information from Phase 2 of community engagement, TTC is ready to move into Phase 3 of the Comprehensive Signage Project. This phase will focus on the continued design iteration of the sign, such as font size and content, maps, and mile markers. During this phase, TTC will present a draft of the Comprehensive Signage Plan and install four pilot signs on the Butler Trail. Trail users and community stakeholders will have opportunities to give feedback on the plan and pilot signage in the Spring of 2024.

Addendum A

Multiple-choice questions:

1. Do you feel that these [bullet point summary of engagement #1 findings] address the majority of the signage concerns?
2. If not, what did we miss?
3. Do you feel that this [presented vision and guiding principles] encompasses what the signage plan should strive for?
4. If not, what did we miss?
5. Do you think this new signage will help you navigate on and around the Trail?
6. Do you think this new signage will help you use the Trail to get to other nearby destinations?
7. Do you think this new signage will help you find amenities, such as restrooms, on the Trail?
8. Do you think this new signage will improve areas of confusion?
9. Do you think this new signage will reduce sign clutter on the Trail?
10. Do you think this new signage will better utilize/help you use the mile markers more?
11. Do you think this new signage will identify trailhead locations for better entrances and exits to/from the Trail?
12. Do you think this new signage will help new Trail users and/or visitors use the Trail and increase their usage?
13. Do you think that this new signage will help get more people/our community out and using the Trail? / Do you think this new signage will help new Trail users and/or visitors use the Trail and increase their usage?
14. Do you think this new signage will identify and signal that you're on the Butler Trail with visual elements such as color and icons?
15. Do you think this new signage will improve my Trail experience as a long-time Trail user?
16. How do you think our signage could better assist folks with all abilities to use the Trail?
17. Overall, do you think that these signs support the vision, guiding principles, and community feedback?

Check-box and open-ended questions:
1. How do you use the Trail?
2. How can our signage tell our stories of the Trail?

Demographic Questions:
1. What is your zipcode?
2. How do you identify yourself?
3. What is your age range?
4. What is your gender identification?
5. How did you hear about this survey?

Addendum B

CATEGORIES	In-person Comments Mentions	Survey Comments Mentions
SIGNAGE CONTENT	29	98
GEN POSITIVE.	80	39
MAPS	43	56
APPEARANCE/DESIGN	13	77
MILE MARKERS	17	70
COLOR NEGATIVE	11	50
WAYFINDING.	30	30
CONNECTIONS	9	49
COLOR POSITIVE	24	26
ALL ABILITIES	4	42
MAINTENANCE	24	16
GEN NEUTRAL	16	28
AMENITIES	13	29
RULES	11	24
SAFETY	13	17
GEN NEGATIVE.	12	18
QUANTITY	1	27
FONT SIZE	2	19
COLOR NEUTRAL	2	17
LANGUAGE	3	13
LIGHTING	6	6
TTC POSITIVE	2	5
TTC NEGATIVE	0	2

Addendum C

For a full spreadsheet of data and comments from all engagement strategies, please visit this [link to the project page](#) on the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department website.